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SORB SELF-STEREOTYPES OF THE SORB IN UPPER SORBIAN PROVERBS

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Abstract

National stereotypes, as with any stereotype, are a simplified representation of the external world. These simplified images find their reflection and are preserved in the language, in words, metaphors, proverbs, and phraseology.

In Upper Sorbian paremiology a self-stereotype of the Sorb is found, a man who primarily sees himself in a positive light, as good, honest, devoted and faithful. A “true” Sorb is also hospitable and pious. The most important component of the sense of identity is, however, the linguistic distinctiveness, which is stressed in the proverbs and expressions.

The self-evaluation is formulated against a clear stereotype of the German, who is treated as a “foreigner”, as well as a symbol of oppression. This stems from the common history and the co-existence of the two nations. However, the image of the German emerging from the Upper Sorbian proverbs is not exclusively negative. There is no ethnocentrism in the Sorbs’ self-stereotype as, despite stressing their own positive traits, they are objective and have a critical attitude towards their own vices. A clearly negative feature of the Sorbs, which appears regularly in the collected material, is the imitation of German customs. In order to describe such representatives of the Sorbian nation a pejorative ethnonym *Němpula* is used.

1. National stereotype vs. self-stereotype

The question about the stereotype – is a question about nationality, it is – as has become customary to say – primarily a question about identity.

This brief statement by Karl Dedecius (1995: 280) highlights two important features of stereotypes: they are an essential factor in the integration of society, and they

perform an important role in the shaping of national identity. Numerous researchers note a link between the concept of national identity and the concept of national stereotype (cf. Błuszkowski 2005).

Berting and Villain-Gandossi (1994: 11) point to other important aspects of the stereotype:

[...] the stereotypes are not concepts, but more or less general representations of social phenomena. Those representations are very often tied to linguistic topics (lexemes, or lexicomata configurations), or verbalisations which evoke a halo of more or less confused associations or connotations, and the representations are always connected to value judgements.

Thus, stereotypes are not concepts, but judgements which have a valuating character (negative or positive) and are expressed by means of language. Moreover, they are simplified generalisations and to a large extent they generalise phenomena. In this context national stereotypes as emotional and value judgements shape the identity of a given national community, clearly distinguishing “their own group” from “the other”. Berting and Villain-Gandossi (1994: 19) also point to the fact that national stereotypes, as images about other people (hetero-stereotypes), always constitute a part of our sense of national identity and contain a representation of the self, that is the self-stereotype.

A self-stereotype of a given nation is the outcome of a search for what is typical of a given group, and yet at the same time different, so distinguishing it from other national communities. Jan Błuszkowski (2005: 16) formulated it in this way:

A national community is searching for what it typifies itself, either similar and, analogous or else different and particular, to make it distinctive from other nations. It sees and interprets itself through the stereotype. The self-stereotype evolves as a result of reducing various manifestations of national life to a common denominator.

Walter Lippmann assigned the self-stereotype a central position in the system of national stereotypes due to the fact that it fulfils important self-identifying functions with which we create and protect our own identity (after Błuszkowski 2005: 117).

Other researchers point out that a positive evaluation of one's own group and a negative evaluation of the other group is clearly conducive to consolidating one's national identity and protecting it. Moreover, favouring one's own group and praising it above others is characteristic of stereotypical convictions, which at the same time means negative features of a different group are more easily recognised as true (Maass, Arcuri 1999: 172).

2. Stereotypes and language

National stereotypes, similarly to all stereotypes, are a simplified representation of the external world, characterised by excessive overgeneralisation and rigidity as well as resilience to change (Kurcz 1994: 12). These simplified images find their reflection

in language and become established in language. As Jerzy Bartmiński (2009) stated in the title of one of his books: “stereotypes reside in language”. They are preserved in words, metaphors, proverbs, phraseology or jokes,¹ thereby confirming their function within the social awareness of a given social group. This is well illustrated by the “European joke” included in the blog of a Member of European Parliament, Marek Siwiec (<http://mareksiwiec.salon24.pl/280478,dowcip-europejski>):

A European paradise: You were invited to an official lunch. You were greeted by an Englishman, the food was prepared by a Frenchman, and an Italian waited on you at the table. Everything was organised by a German.

A European hell: You were invited to an official lunch. You were greeted by a Frenchman, the food was prepared by an Englishman, and a German waited on you at the table. Everything was organised by an Italian.

Stereotypes are thus closely connected with language. There are authors who believe that they do not exist outside language, that there are no alinguistic stereotypes (Maass, Arcuri 1999: 161). Language performs an important role primarily in the transference and consolidation of stereotypes, but also in the expression of one's identity. Moreover, it also fulfils its organisational function – it provides us with a concrete repertoire of cognitive schemata (Maass, Arcuri 1999: 164–172). The lexicon of a given language contains common cultural convictions and provides interesting data on the stereotypes contained therein. It thus comprises not only valuing components, but also cognitive components.

According to Bartmiński (2009: 53–54) the incorporation of the stereotype in a linguistic investigation requires a linguist to answer a number of questions, including in what varieties and styles of language stereotypes are used, with what group of vocabulary they are connected, what linguistic exponents in texts they assume, and finally, what functions they perform in the process of communication. However, problems may arise in the recognition of the stereotype itself, due to, for example, the differing degrees of preservation of its features (stereotypisation). Bartmiński (2009: 93) enumerates the following features of stereotypisation:

[...] repetitiveness of the characteristics of the object in different utterances, which may be investigated statistically, and the preservation of these in language, and thus in the meaning of words that can be observed through an analysis of derived words (derivatives), metaphors, phraseologies, proverbs, as well as the rules for constructing a semantically coherent text.

And he further claims:

¹ The problem of the function of stereotypes and scripts (contrary to stereotypes, the latter refer to an unreal world) in ethnic jokes was covered exhaustively by D. Brzozowska (2008). The author convincingly showed that ethnic jokes reflect stereotypes firmly rooted in social consciousness. Brzozowska (2000) is also the author of a work concerning the stereotypes of women in Polish and English jokes.

Structural-linguistic markers undoubtedly constitute a more important basis for the identification of stereotypes, as that which has been preserved in language is (was) also preserved in the social consciousness of its specific historical period (Bartmiński 2009: 94).

Thus, proverbs and set phrases which constitute the subject matter of the present study, by their very nature indicate in some measure stereotypical content, as they are stabilised (reproduced) semantic combinations with a fixed form.

3. The self-stereotype of the Sorb

Sayings and proverbs are said to conceal much wisdom and truth concerning life as well as ourselves, including many national stereotypes and self-stereotypes. Bartmiński (2009: 82) calls preserving a stereotypical feature in a proverb or a phrase-me “linguaging a stereotype”. However, as he rightly notes:

The criterion of formal preservation may, however, be applied only towards certain groups of stereotypes, mainly historical, whereas a living stereotype of a given designation may have already changed (Bartmiński 2009: 82).

To a large extent this statement is of relevance to the lexical material collected and analysed in this article, as taken from older collections of proverbs. The collection of Sorbian proverbs and phraseological units² dates back to the 1820s, with last anthologies, however, appearing at the beginning of the 20th c. All the later editions are to a large degree based on the older collections (Wölkowa 1990).³

The material collected as the basis for the analysis comes, in part, from the oldest collection of proverbs which appeared in a hand-written periodical “Sserska Nowina” (as a series of articles “Pschißłowa”) published irregularly between the years 1826–1840 by the Sorbian-Lusatian Pulpit Society in Leipzig. The material from this periodical was collected and analysed by Wölkowa (1990: 52–59). The primary source of the proverbs is, however, the new, much extended, edition by Radyserb-Wjela (1997), itself taken from the 1902 *Přisłowa a přisłowne hrónčka a wusłowa hornjołužiskich Serbow*, with German translations by Wirth. Moreover, the phraseological-paremiological collections which appeared in another periodical, the Sorbian Mother Country, (Časopis Mačicy Serbskeje, further: ČMS) have also been used. These are anthologies of proverbs published by Buk (ČMS 1853–54: 31–50, 112–125, ČMS 1855: 111–119, ČMS 1856–57: 41–53), Hórnik (ČMS 1856–57: 100–103, ČMS 1882: 52–58), Muka (ČMS 1883: 20–58), Zejler (ČMS 1888: 19–24), Róla (ČMS 1877: 93–102) and Radyserb-Wjela (ČMS 1890: 51–52, ČMS 1894: 72–76, ČMS 1901: 5–15, ČMS 1905: 3–32, 106–137, ČMS 1908: 88–122). The *Hornjoserbski frazeologiski słownik* (Ivčenko, Wölke 2004), the *Serbski přisłowny leksikon* (Hose 1996), the collection of Sorbian proverbs, *Kajkiž ptačik – tajke hrónčko. Jaki ptak – taka pieśń* (Gardošowa 1984),

² Authors of older collections did not separate proverbs from set phrases.

³ Despite a phraseological dictionary of Upper Sorbian (Ivčenko, Wölke) having been published in 2004, this issue still remains topical.

with Polish translations by Szewczyk, as well as the article by Wölkowa entitled *Wobraz narodow w serbskej frazeologii* (2007) all proved to be extremely valuable as regards the establishment of the meaning of set phrases and proverbs.

Altogether, 66 proverbs, as well as 16 related set phrases were collected. The proverbs and set phrases are exclusively derived from proper nouns, containing ethnonyms both in their base (e.g. *Serb* 'a Sorb', *Němc* 'a German') and derivative forms (e.g. *Serbstwo* 'things Sorbian, the Sorbs', *Němpula* 'a German woman'), as well as in the adjectives formed on the basis of these names (e.g. *serbski* 'Sorbian', *němski* 'German'). This proverb type is particularly important in the description of the national stereotype, as names derived from proper nouns are language units which, on the one hand, serve in the identification, and on the other, in the differentiation of the object named from other objects of the reality (Szutkowski 2000: 62).

Due to the fact that the collected material concerns proverbs registered at the turn of the 19th and 20th c., the statistical definition of the paremiological minimum which would answer the question as to the current level of knowledge of the proverbs among Sorbs is lacking, and also as a result of the commonly observed phenomenon of the disappearance of proverbs from the language (Buttler 1989, Szpila 2003: 61–62) it is assumed that the picture of the Sorb emerging from Upper Sorbian paremiology will to a large extent refer to the past times. Thus, it will be impossible to attempt to reconstruct the self-stereotype, as many proverbs and phrases have been forgotten, possibly along with the changes in the stereotypes. Only some have survived to this day, preserving a picture of the Sorbs who still exist in their own consciousness, as well as a representation and evaluation of other nations.

The self-evaluation of one's own nation is often accomplished by means of comparing it to representatives of other nations. Thus, the stereotypes of other national communities functioning in a given nation may say quite a lot about the nation itself. As Andrzej Kępiński (1995: 157) rightly notes:

Stereotypes say little about those to whom they refer. Very much, on the other hand, about those who have formulated them, as they often reveal their inner complexes and phobias.

National stereotypes, although they do not lack cognitive content, are in the first place strongly marked in terms of emotion, particularly those concerning the nearest neighbours (cf. Bartmiński 2009: 100). In Upper Sorbian paremiology (and phraseology) we cannot, however, find many proverbs or sayings that refer to Poles or Czechs (cf. Wölkowa 2007). And those which do appear, do not directly refer to the self-stereotype of the Sorb. They mostly metaphorically capture the issue of the location of and distance from these countries with regard to the Sorbs, e.g. *Čechi być / to su mi Čechi* 'something strange; something unknown, foreign to me' as well as *to žane / tajke Čechi njejsu* 'it is not that far'.

In the Upper Sorbian paremiological-phraseological collection there is a saying *to su moje Čechi a Lechi*, with a German exposition *Das ist mein ganzer Ein- und Ausgang*, which is probably to be interpreted as 'this is my entire knowledge; all I know'. This appears to be confirmed by a phrase, obsolete today, *znać Čechi a Lechi*

‘to be experienced, to know the world’, which according to Wölkowa (2007: 41) reflected the then Sorbian reality; the Sorbs as serfs were not mobile, and thus, the neighbouring countries symbolised a distant world. On the other hand, the expression *Čechi a Lechi* itself means ‘a crowd of different people’. In the collection a proverb *Ze serbskej hubu móžeš přez Pólsku a Rusku* (‘with a Sorbian mouth you will get through Poland and Russia’) was also recorded, which refers to the linguistic relationship among Slavic nations.

The Sorbs, however, see their own nation through the prism of their relations with the Germans, as their closest neighbours, and this is a relation situated along the ‘us-them’ axis, which is corroborated by the following proverbs: *Hdyž chce čert žanu serbsku wjes wudrěć, sadži jim Němca* / *Hdžež chce satan Serbow drěć, tam jim Němca do wsy sadži* (‘if the Devil wants to punish a Sorbian village, he sends a German’), *Němcy su w Serbach kaž w hejdušce myšacy njerjad* (‘the Germans among the Sorbs are like mice droppings in cereals’), as well as *Z Němcow so małohdy hólcy pěkniši wróća* (‘it is seldom that boys return from Germany improved’). The latter also stresses the fact that “strange” also means ‘worse, evil’, which is confirmed by the expression *wón je so Němcach hroznje zwožahał* (‘he burnt his fingers a lot in Germany’), whose meaning is to be understood as ‘to have had a bad experience with the Germans’.

Such a picture is the result of the particularly close co-existence between the two nations and constitutes a sum of all their common experiences: the German domination and the Sorbian dependence, cf. *Serbski lud – němski sud* (‘Sorbian people – German court’). In Upper Sorbian paremiology there are, however, numerous proverbs from which a picture of the ethnic minority emerges that is not synonymous with a subordinate group or a group that is willing to toe the line: *Serbowžrancy su zastali, Serbja su wostali* (‘Sorbian-eaters were stopped – Sorbians remained’), *Serbow bychu žrali, bychu-li so dali* (‘they would devour the Sorbs, if they were allowed to’, cf. also expressions referring to the suppression of the Sorbians; *Serbow žrać* and *wón by Serbow najradšo zežrał*), *Knježa su serbski lud dajili, ale wón so njeje zadajić dał* (‘lords strangled the Sorbian people, but they would not be crushed’). It is undoubtedly this part of Sorbian history and this national trait which the Sorbian people are particularly proud of: the fight for national independence and identity. Two other sayings refer to this: *Hišće Serbstwo njezhubjene* (‘the Sorbs have not yet perished’) and *Serbja Serbja wostanu* (‘the Sorbs will remain Sorbs’), which testify to their conviction concerning the power of their own nation. A particular role in the preservation of the Sorbian nation was played by the common people, which is confirmed in the proverb: *Burski lud je tón nadobny lud, kiž je nam Serbstwo zdžeržał* (‘noble are the peasants as they have preserved things Sorbian for us’). What is significant is that the Sorbs do not feel themselves to be an inferior group, cf. *Serb ma runje tak mozow kaž Němc* (‘the Sorb has as much wit about him as the German’). On the contrary, it is the Germans whom they consider more foolish, which appears to be confirmed by a set phrase still known today *hlupy Hans/Hanslk*, used in the sense of ‘a dolt’.

The close proximity between the Sorbs and the Germans, as well as the unfortunate experiences stemming from their common history, resulted in the fact that

the Germans are viewed as “the others”. One needs to note, however, that the picture of the German emerging from Upper Sorbian proverbs is not marked by negative emotions. Objectivity is not wanting, which is noticeable, for instance, in the proverb *Kóždy drač je Němc, ale kóždy Němc njeje drač* (‘each torturer is a German, but not each German is a torturer’). This is also corroborated by the following proverbs: *Serbski pan abo němski, to je wšo jedyn čert* (‘a Sorbian master or a German master – both are a devil’), *Hač serbske, hač němske: liški su liški* (‘whether Sorbian or German: a fox remains a fox’), *Čerći su čerći, kaž w Němcach tak w Serbach* (‘devils are devils, both among the Germans and the Sorbs’), *Nichtó w Serbach a Němcach tak hlupy kaž mudrač* (‘no-one among the Sorbs or the Germans is as stupid as a know-all’), and *Džělawu ruku witaju w Serbach a Němcach* (‘hard-working hands are welcomed by both Sorbs and Germans’). These sayings result from the close co-existence between the two nations, but they also present commonly accepted truths and values, which are, for example, contained in the statement that it is not important whether an individual is a German or a Sorb – the most important fact is what sort of a man he is.

Undoubtedly, however, it is on the stereotype of the German that the self-stereotype of the Sorb is built. It again what is German, what is “theirs”, that what is Sorbian, and thus “ours”, is marked. These differences and the otherness shape the Sorbian national identity, an inseparable part of which is constituted by its linguistic autonomy, and its preservation, for which the Sorbs had to fight. A proverb *Wo maćerskej rěči tak trubja – a serbskim džěcom ju rubja* (‘they shout out about the mother tongue, but they rob Sorbian children of it’) refers to this. Throughout the history of the Sorbian nation the use of the national language has been repeatedly banned. The German language was perceived by the Sorbs not only as “foreign”, but also as constituting a threat to their own language as well as their national identity. It was of particular importance in religious life, as expressed in the proverb: *Serbam němski přédować, rěka njebjesa jim brać* (‘to preach to a Sorb in German means to take heaven away from him’).

In Upper Sorbian there is a somewhat obsolete phraseme *němski spěwać*, in the sense of ‘to swear, curse’, as well as a proverb *Němski spěwać / sakrować njepomha ničo* (‘praying/cursing in German will not help’). Wölkowa (2007: 40) claims that the verb *spěwać* is to be understood in the sense of ‘to pray’ here, as in the expression *paćerje spěwać*. Moreover, she believes that the two sayings also indicate another distinctive aspect. That is, the Sorbs see themselves as a devout nation, contrary to the Germans, whom they deem to be less pious, even lacking in piety (Wölkowa 2007: 40).

The threat to the Sorbian identity from the German language, but also to the Sorbian culture is confirmed by the proverb *Serb so ničo njeporjedži, hdyž so po němsku złoži* (‘a Sorb will not better himself when he supports the German language’). Here one can clearly sense a fear of following German standards and behaviours, the first step of which is adopting the German language.

On the other hand, however, the Sorbs clearly value bilinguality, which finds confirmation in two proverbs, cf. *Serb ma dvě hubje: serbsku a němsku* (‘a Sorb has

two mouths: a Sorbian and a German') and *Hdyž ěi serbskej hubje njezrozumja, wučehnješ z kapsy němsku* ('if they do not understand the Sorbian mouth, take the German one out of your pocket'), as well as in a set phrase *wučahnyć ze zaka serbsku hubu* 'to start speaking Sorbian' and *to tam němski jazyk ze zaka wučehn'* 'to start speaking German'.

Without doubt, the question of language is an important self-identifying factor for the Sorb, and to this day a somewhat jocular *Němc na hubu bije / ěepje někomu* 'someone speaks with a German accent' is known and used. As Wölkowa (2007: 40) claims, this set phrase reflects earlier experiences with Germans who learnt Sorbian, but they spoke it with an accent which disclosed their origins. Learning Sorbian cannot have been easy for the Germans and they learnt it unwillingly, which is referred to in a proverb *Serb nawuknje němski, Němc pak lědy-być serbski* ('a Sorb learns German, but a German hardly ever learns Sorbian'). At times, however, German-speaking Sorbs too revealed the influence of the Sorbian language, as the above-mentioned expression quite soon gained an alternative form and instead of "German" "Sorb" is used, cf. *Serb na hubu bije / ěepje někomu* 'someone speaks with a Sorbian accent'. Today two other variants are also possible, e.g. "German" is replaced by "Polish" or more generally "foreign" (Wölkowa 2007: 40).

It appears that language is second only to the ethnic proper noun (ethnonym) as the most significant component of self-identification. It is particularly important when the existence of a given nation is under threat or it is undergoing a revival, which in the case of the Sorbian community, as well as numerous others, took place in the 19th c. Ewa Orlof (2002: 152) claims:

The nations reviving in the 19th c. believed that in language there lived the spirit of the nation, and one who changed the language, betrayed the spirit.

This assumption finds its reflection in the proverbs: *W Němcach poby tři dny a hižo wjac njemóže serbski* ('he stayed for three days among Germans and has already forgotten Sorbian'), *Hody je do Němcow šol, a na swjatki doma je hižo serbskeho jazyka njeměl* ('he visited Germans at Christmas, and on returning home at Pentecost he did not know Sorbian any more'), and *Žadyn djas na Serbow hórši hač zněmčeny Serb* ('no devil is worse for a Sorb than a Germanised Sorb'). A bitter truth can be heard, in that the worst threat to the Sorbs are the Sorbs themselves: egoistic, thinking only about their particular interests, and associating with the Germans. Such an opinion was directly expressed in the proverbs: *Serbow najhórši kažerjo běchu sebični Serbja* ('the greatest enemies of the Sorbs were egoistic Sorbs') and *Chwala so, kak Serbstwo twarja, a z Němcami na Serbow swarja* ('they boast of how they build things Sorbian, and yet they abuse the Sorbs together with the Germans'). One may sense a considerable distance and objectivism in their self-evaluation here.

Within this critical self-stereotype there is a pejorative ethnonym *Němpula*, which refers to when a Sorb emulates a German, cf. *Němpula – je zympula* ('who pretends to be a German is a blockhead'). Such imitation referred to a large extent to clothes, as there once used to be a clear distinction in the way of dressing between the Germans and the Sorbs, primarily among women. This difference is emphasised

in the phrasemes *serbska chodźić* ‘to wear Sorbian national costume’ and *němska chodźić* ‘to dress in a fashionable way, as in the town; not to wear a Sorbian attire’ and in the proverb *Wčera serbska do města – džensa hižo Němpula* (‘yesterday [went] to town a Sorbian, and today a German monkey’). Today no such differences in dressing exist, as the Sorbian costume is only worn by just a few women of the older generation.

Those Sorbs who emulated the Germans were attempting to elevate their social status, which led to a pejorative comparison *hordy kaž Němpula* ‘very proud’ (Wölkowa 2007: 41). Attributing pride as a distinctive national trait to the Germans is linked with the fact that they performed important social functions and were members of a higher social strata. The Sorbs, on the other hand, did not see themselves as proud people, cf. *Serbej přisteji hordosć kaž prošerjej pjeršćen* (‘pride suits the Sorb as much as a ring suits a beggar’).

All these proverbs and set phrases express the sense that the national existence is under threat due to assimilation (Wölkowa 2007: 41), and the danger is constituted by those Sorbs who wish to imitate the Germans. It is to them that the phraseme *so swoju serbsku kožu slec* (‘get rid of the Sorbian skin, get rid of things Sorbian, start behaving like a German’, refers.

The representation of one’s own social or national group, its virtues and vices, is often formed under the influence of its tradition and history. The Sorbs are undoubtedly proud of their origin and their ancestors, who were honest people, cf. *Stari Serbja, nadobny lud* (‘old Sorbs were honourable people’), or *Stary Serb – a sprawna duša* (‘an old Sorb – a kind-hearted soul’). Moreover, they were famous for their hospitality, which is corroborated by two proverbs: *Serbski dom ma hostliwe blido* (‘a well-laden table in a Sorbian home’) and *Hospodna třěcha je hižo zastarsku w Serbach chwalena była* (‘a hospitable home was extolled among the Sorbs even in the old days’).

Sorbian hospitality is also connected with sayings and proverbs referring to the stereotype of the German, who in this context is presented, rather surprisingly, as poor, even as a beggar, whereas the Sorbs have never been beggars, or at least they do not perceive themselves in this way, cf. *W starych Serbach njej’ ničto z prošerjom był* (‘There were no beggars among the Sorbs’). Wölkowa (2007: 41) believes that this most probably relates to the inhabitants of mountainous villages situated to the south of Bautzen, who were mainly weavers and did not possess their own land. Indeed she quotes an account left by a rector of Malschwitz, August Sykora, who in his memoirs writes that on the occasion of the church fair or on feast days cakes were baked and shared with the poor. This finds confirmation in a rich collection of proverbs: *Serb nabudže němskeho jědźka, hdyž je sej tykancow napiekł* (‘a Sorb will win a German over when he bakes cakes’), *Němc će njeprošeny na kermušu přińdže* (‘a German will come to the church fair uninvited’), *Njekomužkuli serbski muž smjerdži, ale serbski tykanc jom wonja* (‘some find the Sorbian man stinks, but the Sorbian cake smells good’), *Bóh zežiwja Němca, było-li tež ze serbskim chłěbom* (‘God feeds the Germans, even if only with Sorbian bread’), *Němski prošer tež serbski chłěb jě* (‘the German beggar also eats Sorbian bread’) and *Němskim prošerjam*

tež serbski chléb stóží ('German beggars also relish Sorbian bread'). There is also a reference to this situation in an expression *smjeć so kaž Němc na tykanc* ('to laugh like a German at a cake') 'enjoy much, laugh'.

The self-stereotype of the Sorb is clearly a built-in reference to the past and to the greatest moments in the history of the Sorbian nation. In Upper Sorbian paremiology we find examples testifying to the fact that the Sorbs view themselves as a faithful and devoted nation, cf. *Za krala Serb rad žiwjenje pušći* ('a Sorb is ready to give his life for the king'), and *Žadyn lud swěrnši kralej hač Serbja* ('no nation is more faithful to the king than the Sorbs').

Sorbs are also good soldiers, cf. *Serb je dobry wojak, to so wšudžom wě* ('a Sorb is also a good soldier – everybody knows this'), *Serbskich hólcow kral rady na konje sadža* ('the king readily puts Sorbian boys on horses'), and *Kral sebi serbskich wojakow chwali* ('the king praises Sorbian soldiers'). However, they are at times rash and violent, cf. *Serb ma sčérpliwu kožu, ale tež rózkatu pjasć* ('a Sorb has a patient skin, but a restive hand'), and *Serbska krej – tež zymna woda njej* ('Sorbian blood is no cold water'). Although all these truths refer to the distant past during the period of national revival they undoubtedly constituted an important element of the Sorbian identity.

Upper Sorbian proverbs also offer a positive picture of Sorbian women as good candidates for wives: *Serbsku Hanku sej wzmi, to so žeńtwa poradži* ('the best choice for marriage is a Sorbian Hanka'), as well as being modest and taking care of their looks: *Tykana kapička – Serbowka přistojna* ('a pinned up bonnet – a neat Sorbian woman').

Finally, in the Sorbian self-stereotype there is, as Bartmiński (2009: 109) notes, a picture of a "true" representative, and thus not only what he is like, but also what he should be like. Primarily honesty is emphasised, which is confirmed by many proverbs, cf. *Ryzy Serb je sprawna duša / Prawy Serb a sprawna duša* ('a true Sorb – a kind-hearted soul'), *Sprawna duša so za Serba šluša* ('an honest soul becomes the Sorb'), and *Serb niesprawnej duše njeje hódny serbskeho mnjena* ('a Sorb without an honest soul does not deserve to be called a Sorb'), as well as in a comparison *sprawnik kaž ryzy Serb* ('kind-hearted/honest like a true Sorb'), which refer to someone very honest, and an expression *hajić staru serbsku sprawnošć* ('to foster the old Sorbian honesty'), which stresses the meaning of this characteristic for the Sorbs. In most the soul is mentioned, which is to be interpreted as a symbol of national identity. A synonym of the soul is the heart, as the most important manifestation of one's identification with one's own nation, cf. *Serbski jazyk će nječini Serba, jelizo serbskeje wutroby njejsy* ('the Sorbian language does not make you a Sorb if you do not have the Sorbian heart'). The heart is a symbol of self-identification, which is confirmed by a motto-proverb *Pod němskej drastu, wostań ći wutroba serbska* ('under a German robe protect a Sorbian heart'). On the other hand, in the proverb *Njeh Saksonski, njeh Bramborski: jeno zo nadobny Serb* ('he may be Saxon or Branderburgian, as long as he is an honest Sorb'), apart from the aforementioned honesty as a feature of a "true" Sorb, Sorbian identity is elevated above all geopolitical divides.

The “true” Sorb, and thus one worthy of his name, is also a good, diligent, pious, as well as thrifty, man, cf. *Ryzy Serb ma sprawnu wutrobu, ale tež wiselnu hłowu* (‘A true Sorb has a good heart, but also a tough head’), and *Wěš mi serbski abejcej? – Spěwaj, džěłaj, lutuj sej!* (‘do you know the Sorbian ABC’ – pray, work and economise!’). He is also truthful, cf. *Serbski jazyk zelhać njesmě* (‘a Sorbian tongue cannot lie’), and *Sprawny Serb so njezaroća* (‘an honest Sorb does not swear’).

To sum up, the self-stereotype of the Sorb that emerges from Upper Sorbian paremiology and phraseology is of a man who sees himself in a positive light, as good, honest, devoted and faithful, as well as hospitable and pious, while the most important component of his national identity is the distinctiveness of his language. This positive picture of the Sorb is built on a clear stereotype of the German, who is treated as a “foreigner”, as well as a symbol of oppression. There is, however, no ethnocentrism in the self-evaluation, as despite underlining the positive features one can see the objectivism and a critical approach to one’s own vices. A clearly negative feature of the Sorbs which keeps surfacing in the collected material, is that of following German customs. This manifests itself, among others, in the way of dressing as well as in the use of the German language.

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